

She Was a Child Instagram Influencer. Her Fans Were Grown Men.

“Jacky Dejo” was introduced to social media by her parents as a snowboarding prodigy. Now 18, she has seen the dark side of the internet — and turned a profit from it.

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By **Jennifer Valentino-DeVries and Michael H. Keller**

Jennifer Valentino-DeVries traveled to St. Maarten to meet with Jacky Dejo as part of her reporting on child influencers and their parents. Michael H. Keller has been investigating online child exploitation for five years.

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For her 18th birthday in March, “Jacky Dejo,” a snowboarder, bikini model and child influencer turned social media entrepreneur, celebrated on the secluded island of Dominica.

On Instagram, she appeared in strappy swimsuits, basking luxuriously on a black-sand beach and floating in a jungle stream.

Her fans — thousands of men had been following her through her teens as she posted and sold photos — wished her well and eagerly anticipated her next move online as an adult.

“Happy birthday,” one wrote in French. “I can’t wait to see you without any clothes on.”

Born two years after the launch of Facebook, she belongs to the first generation to grow up with social media and the multibillion-dollar creator economy that is redefining adolescence for girls.

A Dutch citizen — her real name is Jacquelina de Jong — she has lived in more than a half-dozen countries and picks up languages with ease. But she is equally at home on the internet, where she has built a global fan base that is dominated by American men. At 16, with the consent of her parents, she was pulling in upward of \$50,000 some months, she says, charging for access to her online posts and images.

When The New York Times began investigating the culture of underage girl influencers more than a year ago, Jacky Dejo — or simply Jacky, as she is widely known by her followers on the internet — quickly emerged as a prominent and enigmatic figure.



Jacky's mother and father launched a parent-run Facebook account when she was 6 years old to share her snowboarding prowess. Theo Acworth

Still underage, she was posting salacious images of herself on Instagram and had her own photo-selling platform. Everyone in the ever-growing world of child influencers seemed to know about her — mothers who managed their underage daughters' Instagram accounts, men who followed the girls on various platforms and anti-child-exploitation crusaders who condemned all of it.

To better understand the alluring and sometimes perilous lifestyle so many of these girls aspire to achieve, The Times asked Jacky to share her story. Her experience is hardly that of a typical American girl for many reasons, including Jacky's independence and international escapades. But it illustrates in rare detail the dangers faced by child influencers everywhere, and how adolescence for many girls is being molded by platforms that value — and monetize — attention from men who are sexually interested in minors.

Jacky agreed to talk, and her father said he and her mother had no objections. (Since 16, she has been legally emancipated under Dutch law, but her father in particular remains a regular presence in her life.) What followed were months of conversations in English on Telegram and Zoom, and a visit by a reporter and photographer to St. Maarten in the Caribbean, where she lives.

More than a decade online has made Jacky suspicious and cynical. She can be thoughtful and nuanced, but can also exhibit the bravado and self-certainty of a teenager. She decries online child exploitation, blaming parents as much as the leering men, but proudly proclaims that she has turned the web's ever-present male gaze to her advantage.

As she recounts her experience, it becomes apparent how much of it has been spent fending off pedophiles, outsmarting scammers and shedding the innocence of childhood.

"If a psycho blackmails a girl in a bikini," she asserted in one somewhat contentious exchange about the risks of posting sexualized photos, "I don't think the bikini is the problem here."

It began harmlessly in 2012, when she was 6 years old and her mother and father launched a parent-run Facebook account to share her snowboarding prowess. By the time she was 8, they had added an Instagram account, where they highlighted free gear she received from brands like Adidas and Nitro Snowboards. They also posted photos of her surfing and skateboarding, two other favorite activities.

As she approached her teens, she began drawing inappropriate attention from men online. She was shielded from the worst of it, like when her parents deleted photos men sent of their genitalia. But the risks in this new world they had introduced her to escalated after she turned 13 and began promoting a swimwear brand.

When she was 15, she and her father said, someone stole her phone and posted her private images, including nude photos she had taken of herself. Not long after, a man began recruiting her to a platform where people regularly spent \$10 to \$100 on photos of underage girls, often in revealing clothing.

Jacky was game, but she describes the experience as a harsh introduction to a predatory online industry in which girls are groomed by men and often enabled by their parents. It was also her first taste of true financial independence: Shortly after she finished her schooling, she and her father said, her earnings had already topped \$800,000. She declined to share her full financial records, but others in the industry described the figure as plausible.

After she turned 16, she sought to make more money by recruiting teenagers for her own platform, which she describes as a “girl-managed” alternative for those 15 or older. Jacky first counsels them and their parents about the perils of their target audience — men sexually attracted to them. For almost all the girls, the business model is to sell racy images that do not involve outright nudity, though the site has pushed the limits of the law.

“I kind of try to give everyone the opportunity to do what I did,” she said. But, she added, “they have to understand that it can affect things in life.”



Seara Adair, an anti-exploitation activist prominent on TikTok, pleaded with Jacky to stop selling suggestive photos. Kendrick Brinson for The New York Times

Running her own website for girls has come with reputational risks. Some social media personalities known for speaking out against child exploitation speculate that she is a front for a pedophile, or that she is being exploited by her parents. Some don't believe her phone was stolen and say she sold the explicit images herself. The Times found no evidence for those claims. Jacky, who was vehement in denying them and denouncing those behind them, shared documentation both refuting her critics and showing that some of the accusations were spread by men who harassed her online.

On a Telegram channel with her fans early last year, she mockingly posted conversations she once had with Seara Adair, an anti-exploitation activist prominent on TikTok who had pleaded with her to stop selling suggestive photos.

"For whatever reason you have become desensitized to what you are doing. And I'm honestly sad for you," Ms. Adair wrote. "I hope you don't get hurt. I hope you see clearly one day."

Writing on Telegram last year, Jacky dismissed Ms. Adair as a "body hater" and frequently called her out. Her male followers egged her on and suggested Ms. Adair and other critics would be satisfied only when "women and girls cover themselves head to toe."

TELEGRAM USER

Do people know that if you boat down the canals of the Netherlands, you see whole families sunning in the nude on their lawns? Seriously the fear of nudity today is soooooo stupid.

Meanwhile Brooke Shields in playboy, pretty baby and blue lagoon, her claim to fame.

Let people live.

A message from one of Jacky's fans about attitudes toward nudity. (This and other posts have been edited for length and clarity.) (Screenshot.)

As part of its investigation into the child-influencer ecosystem, The Times earlier this year examined thousands of public Instagram accounts run by adults for their young daughters, as well as the algorithms that play a role in surfacing children's images to men who have a sexual interest in them.

Jacky's story offers a look at what can happen next, when girls or their families cultivate relationships directly with online admirers by soliciting cash or charging for photos, either on their own or through websites.

She acknowledged in conversations that the creator economy had made it easier for predators to target girls, often with little recourse, but she draws little distinction between men who bother her online and those in her daily life — except the online abuse comes with financial rewards.

Her attitude, feminist scholars said, is common among women who work in the sex industry: Charging men gives them financial stability and the feeling that they are taking the upper hand in a society that objectifies them regardless of their choices.

Jacky does not believe she will be in the industry forever, having made investments in real estate and other ventures. She speaks knowledgeably of the tax advantages running her businesses from St. Maarten, a self-governing country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

But the day after she turned 18, her playbook had not changed. She delighted her online followers by joining the adult site OnlyFans and soon thereafter, Playboy.com.

"I'm happy," she said, noting that she owns a boat and an apartment and has plenty of money to stay active in the international snowboarding circuit. "Can't really beat it."

'I Didn't Know That It Was So Bad'

In many ways, Jacky takes after her father, Jacques de Jong, a self-assured, globe-trotting Dutchman who made his money primarily through duty-free trading.

It was the burly, bearded Mr. de Jong, a snowboarder himself, who introduced her to the sport at age 3, and she said she took it up because she idolized him. She was unusually daring for her age, and within a few years was winning junior competitions.

Mr. de Jong said he and Jacky's mother initially put her online as a natural extension of her athletic career, given that she was regularly photographed at events and won media attention on her own.

"To see her smiling, it's the greatest thing," he told a Norwegian television station that profiled Jacky when she was 8. Two years later, she was the Dutch women's snowboarding champion in halfpipe and big air.

Mr. de Jong said they taught Jacky from an early age to be careful online. He recalled an instance when "some guy pretending to be a woman" messaged her. Mr. de Jong instructed her to keep the conversation going to teach her how to spot predators.

When the person started writing pointedly and glowingly about her appearance, Mr. de Jong said it was unlikely that any woman would talk that way to a young girl.



A screenshot of a video by Norwegian television station that profiled Jacky when she was 8. Her father was being interviewed. TV 2

Her parents split up before she was 10, and, as she explains it, they decided that her personality made her better suited for living primarily with her father. Jacky and her father said her mother, informed about this article, declined to be interviewed.

Young Jacky and her father moved repeatedly. She lived in Canada, Indonesia and Andorra, on the border between Spain and France. From her early teen years, her parents allowed her to travel on her own to compete in snowboarding events, provided that she made up any schoolwork.

Jacky was raised with what she describes as a European sensibility to be comfortable with her body, and she spent years surfing in a bikini in places like Bali. Clothing and sports brands frequently sent her free products in the hope that she would promote them.

So it seemed innocuous, she said, when at age 13 a youth swimwear brand, Chance Loves, offered to collaborate with her on social media after she contacted the company and praised its swimsuits. The brand featured her on its website and sent her bikinis, which she sported in photos she posted on Instagram.

The owner, Anna Goddard, said that “Chance” was a nickname for her daughter and that the brand’s bathing suits and photos were age-appropriate. The company has focused less on social media over the years “because we understand the dangers it can bring,” she said.

Jacky’s parents supported it at the time, but looking back, her father expressed misgivings. If he had it to do over, he said, he would tell her to wait “a little bit later” because the photos attracted pedophiles.

“I honestly didn’t know that it was so bad,” he said, referring to the presence of pedophiles on Instagram. “I don’t see anything attractive in a 13-year-old girl in a bikini, but apparently others do.”

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A few months after signing on with Chance Loves, Jacky was fielding requests from photographers and obscure clothing brands that sent her bathing suits and tight athletic outfits.

"At first we didn't think too much about it," she said, but eventually some of the men encouraged her to travel to the United States to do special photo shoots, and this "set off alarm bells."

Years later, she found out that her photos were being discussed on internet forums for men attracted to underage girls and that they were, in her view, "patiently grooming" her by sending free things.

Two of the photographers who contacted her were later charged with child exploitation crimes. One of the clothing brands, Chixit, The Times has reported, is run by a man who also registered website names related to bestiality.

"They were all dodgy," Jacky said.

Jacky said she didn't know whether the theft of her nude images was a coincidence or related to her growing online popularity. Her phone was stolen in Barcelona at a skateboarding venue, she said — an account confirmed by a skateboarding friend who contacted The Times when reporters asked Jacky for corroboration.

Someone then messaged her, threatening to publish her images unless she sent more illegal content, a demand she did not give into.

Her family filed a report and spoke with the police in Spain, she and her father said, but nothing came of it. When the blackmailer posted the photos, she was initially shaken. She wasn't ashamed of the material, she said, but it was meant for private use.

Soon she devised a plan to fight back.

'Confronted Daily With Psychopaths'

Diving headfirst into the dark recesses of the internet, Jacky decided there were two types of men online: those who were useful to her and those she needed to destroy.

The men sharing her nude photos fell into the second category.

To stop them, she identified the people behind the posts. She chalked up her success to being "persistent by nature" and "pretty good at the internet." She also built a network of unlikely informants — men who spend time in pedophile groups.

"You'd be surprised how quickly some people stop when you find out who they are and call their wives or bosses to explain what they're doing," she said.

Her crusade quickly earned her a reputation as someone difficult to bully, but it did not lead to her exit from that world. Not long after her phone was stolen, Jacky got a lucrative offer from a man running a new influencer platform, SelectSets, that posted images of young women and girls, some scantily clad.

At first, she and her father thought the man, an American named James Lifestri, was running a scam. But when he guaranteed her \$10,000 a month to start, she said, they took notice.

At 15, her parents told her, she was mature enough to make her own decision. She announced her new venture with an Instagram photo of her straddling a motorcycle in a string bikini. Her understated makeup and natural hair styling made her look very much a teenager, and her audience reacted positively.

“Submissive and breedable,” one Instagram commenter posted. On a dark-web forum for pedophiles monitored by the Canadian Center for Child Protection, a user said that her “fans went crazy” over her “semi-naked pictures.” Until then, the user wrote, most of them had known Jacky only as “a ~normal~ girl who likes to skate and ski.”

Bikini-clad Jacky was “well known” to a subset of her fans, however — those who diligently monitor the niche world of brands that feature girls in bikinis, the user said. For Jacky, it was further confirmation that pedophiles had been watching and tracking her for years.

JACKY

JACKY

Regular school won't give time of for peagants

Or shoots or whatever

I was lucky because I would get time off for my sports to travel but no way for modelling

I started selling on selectsets in my last year and it gave a little buzz in the beginning but nothing disturbing and 2 boys and I think a teacher did subscribe lol

😊 7 🎉 3

TELEGRAM USER

not sure how i'd teach with you in the class

💯 2

An interaction between Jacky and a fan. (Screenshot.)

Reflecting on it all, Jacky said she now sees a connection among the sexualized moments in her online life, starting with the men she attracted when she was 13 and posed in swimwear. She speculates that the “perv buyers” who saw her stolen photos had a hand in her being recruited to SelectSets, though she has no evidence of that.

Contacted by The Times, Mr. Lidestri, who had run photography sites, said that he first learned of Jacky through a photographer in 2021. He said that he was a tech entrepreneur, no longer in the photography business, and had provided information to law enforcement about “people who weren’t playing by the rules.”

When she polices online forums for her photos, Jacky often encounters child sexual abuse material, which she reports to law enforcement. Some mothers of child-influencers have also requested her help in tracking down online predators or harassers.

“At the end of the day, it’s not really my business to do this,” she said. “It should be the police on there, not me.”

In her first interaction with The Times last year, she reached out on the messaging app Telegram to report a man who had been threatening girls like her on Instagram. Over the past year, she shared other instances of abuse, including groups that openly posted and sold content involving the sexual extortion, or “sextortion,” of children, and a man who posted one of her stolen videos in an attempt to get her attention after she blocked him on Telegram.

Separately, in May 2023, she sent a tip to the F.B.I. complaining about a man in North Carolina who she said had harassed her and posted sexually graphic images of children. More than a year later, the man was charged with possessing child sexual abuse material, but only after a technology company flagged his account.

The experience frustrated her. “We get confronted daily with psychopaths,” she said of girls on social media, “and nobody cares.”

Jacky has grown ambivalent about men who buy her photos on her various platforms, but she nevertheless sees the benefit. In the case of her own site, buyers — most of them from the United States and India, she said — have paid about \$75 for a package of photos, which are often salacious but do not include nudity, and about \$11 monthly to see what’s available for sale.

Other girls and parents “try to make believe” that many of their customers are women, she said, or men without a sexual interest in them. “I’m not stupid,” she said.

Her most trusted customers moderate her Telegram channels, answering questions from other men and even blocking those who are disrespectful. They often refer admiringly to her as “Queen Jacky.”

She likes to banter with them, making sure they know when she posts new photos.

“Hello Chan people. Let’s get your ass moving a bit. You all seem sleepy quiet 😊😊,” she wrote on a Telegram channel, posting an animated GIF of her pole-dancing in her apartment.

“Light that 🔥 queen 😊,” one customer responded.

‘Determined and Ambitious’

At its peak, SelectSets was making Jacky tens of thousands of dollars a month, she said, so it came as a surprise to her when Mr. Lidestri decided to shut it all down in the summer of 2022.

He offered to sell her the business, but the deal fell through and she decided to start something on her own. Records from St. Maarten show Jacky’s father signed documents in 2022 to help her launch a site, MyInfluencer.Academy. She was 16.

JACKY
 Welcome to my channel 🔥
 On here you will find updates about my life , new sets , tiktoks that get banned 😊 and more 🤝
 Enjoy , have fun and don’t go to crazy if you comment


A message from Jacky to her Telegram followers.
 (Screenshot.)

Sitting on a couch in her apartment, wearing a T-shirt, she nonchalantly explained how simple it was to build an online teen photo marketplace.

Her search for a developer started on Google, where she found Upwork.com, an online exchange for contract labor. She hired a man in Vietnam with good reviews; he built the site by adapting SelectSets’ model. She then paid a lawyer to review her content policies.

She persuaded some girls from SelectSets to join, and also recruited from Instagram and Patreon. She even took suggestions from men in a Telegram channel.

“MIA is the place to be we are 100% LEGAL but not letting ourselves be pushed by haters/wokies/and whatever,” she posted, using the initials for her site.

In her quest to make the site safe, she sought advice from a variety of experienced hands, including a photographer, James Grady, who has run racy teen and nude adult sites. In 2002, he was charged in Colorado with 886 counts of child exploitation but was found not guilty by a jury.

In an interview, Mr. Grady said Jacky came across as “determined and ambitious” when they spoke.

The two discussed how to prevent image piracy, a big concern for Jacky ever since her nude photos were stolen. Mr. Grady said she seemed particularly intent on chasing the bad actors. “She likes to poke the bear,” he said.

By the time she finished her schooling, Jacky says, her earnings had already topped \$800,000. Martina Tuaty
for The New York Times

Her biggest challenge, however, has been managing payments. She started with Stripe, a credit card processor that later dropped her for violating its content standards, something Jacky denied. On Telegram, she blamed Ms. Adair for stirring up trouble.

"Don't forget to spam this bitch who with her friends has been trying to spoil the fun for you!" Jacky wrote. "Going to be so much fun to destroy her and her psycho social justice warrior friends."

In an interview, Ms. Adair acknowledged reaching out to Stripe and was unapologetic. "I can't imagine what level she's been manipulated to," said Ms. Adair, who was sexually abused by her stepfather as a child, "to feel like this is who she has to be."

Jacky said she was supportive of efforts against child sexual abuse but believed that she was not a victim and Ms. Adair unfairly targeted her based on false rumors. "I felt she was wasting a lot of time on me where she could have been looking at other people and actually done good," she said.

'It Doesn't Feel Safe At All'

Like most new businesses, Jacky's site has struggled to gain its footing.

Besides Jacky, there have been nine people who have posted content in recent months, including three underage girls and one of her male friends, who has shared unrelated skateboarding content. Jacky, who takes 20 percent off the top, said that at its most successful, the site grossed about \$100,000 a month, but for much of its run she has only broken even.

Lately, most of the girls have posted only sporadically, she said, and Jacky herself has focused on OnlyFans. Last month, she announced she planned to shut down the site.

She has never allowed nudity or images that focus on genitals. Still, the content is almost always sexual, and she advises girls looking to promote themselves to go on Telegram, where men openly share sexual fantasies about minors.

Falls are inevitable on such a legal and moral tightrope. When one girl posted explicit content, Jacky removed it, she said, but not before a blackmailer got the images and sent them to the girl's high school.

The Times created an account to preview the photos for sale. One set showed a 17-year-old pulling a bikini bottom so tightly that The Times, concerned that it could be illegal, reported it to the authorities as would be required under U.S. law for what is commonly known as child pornography. Separately, the Canadian child-protection center reviewed images from the site that were shared on Telegram and found that one of Jacky, before she turned 18, may have run afoul of the law.

Jacky said that she did not believe the images crossed the line and that her lawyers had signed off on the website's general guidelines.

Time and again, she complained bitterly about other sites that allow parents to post racy images of their children and yet have seemingly flourished. On one site, SuperFanVerse, an account featuring an 11-year-old girl advertised photos in a bikini and "see thru dress" and sought cash tips so she could "get some Roblox \$\$," referring to an online game platform popular with children.

Jacky speaks knowledgeably of the tax advantages running her businesses from St. Maarten. Martina Tuaty
for The New York Times

On another, Passes, a mother created an account using her own identity and charged for bikini photos of her 12-year-old, getting around the site's age requirement. The same child had previously belonged to yet another platform, BrandArmy, based on a falsified birth certificate. Jacky and that minor both posted photos on the site, and their accounts were removed for being too racy.

SuperFanVerse did not respond to a request for comment. Passes' founder and chief executive, Lucy Guo, said the account featuring the 12-year-old was removed when The Times asked about it. "We are committed to enforcing our age restrictions and community guidelines," Ms. Guo said.

BrandArmy stopped accepting new underage boys and girls last December because they drew an unwanted audience, said its founder, Ramon Mendez. The threat of nuisance lawsuits from parents over lost income, he said, persuaded him to keep the existing underage accounts active.

"We don't want to be in this business," he said in an interview. "It doesn't feel safe at all."

Jacky said the parents were practicing what she calls "financial extortion" at the expense of their daughters.

"They all want money, and if it goes wrong, they point the finger only the other way, never at themselves," she said.

On Jacky's platform, she insists — repeatedly and forcefully — that the girls are in charge.

None of the others posting on her site would comment. But the mother of one of the underage girls said sites like Jacky's helped parents and children avoid direct interactions on Telegram, where she believed "groomers will start using gullible mothers and force them to make content that goes beyond what is acceptable."

'How to Survive'

In a typical week, Jacky does a photo shoot or two with a friend in her apartment or at the beach, using her own camera; she doesn't trust professional photographers. She then spends a few hours editing and posting photos, and a few more interacting with fans.

Over lunch at a beachside restaurant, she discussed her move into adult pornography.

Her black purse features a golden Playboy logo, one of the perks from her work as an influencer for the brand since she was 16.

Playboy first recruited her as a non-nude model on Instagram and its own website. But the company later removed her from the site, explaining that the platform would be adult only, Jacky said. She rejoined the site shortly after her 18th birthday this year. Playboy did not respond to a request for comment.

Now she charges from \$5 a month on Playboy and \$10 a month on OnlyFans for nude images as well as photos in provocative clothing.

"I'm Dutch, and we have just always had a very open approach to things like sex work," she said, favoring her steak tartare over her French fries. "Honestly, what I'm doing is pretty tame."

A tour of Jacky's business office, on the second floor of a blue cement commercial building, shows she is serious about other lines of work. It is scattered with papers and labels for caviar tins, and the back room houses large refrigerators of caviar, which she discussed at length while offering tastings on a mother-of-pearl spoon.

She recently started a company importing caviar and selling it to high-end local restaurants and private yachts. The inspiration, she said, came from her father's erstwhile business selling caviar from Moldova and Russia during her childhood, when she recalled sneaking it from the refrigerator and greedily eating it with her hands.

Talk of her father causes Jacky to tear up — a rare expression of sadness. He said he was diagnosed last year with pancreatic cancer. "They said there is nothing you can do," she said.

Mr. de Jong, who also lives in St. Maarten and usually sees Jacky a few times a week, said he was consoled by the fact that his daughter had a financial cushion and enough business knowledge to succeed wherever the future might lead.

"I'm not worried for her," he said. "She knows how to survive."

Julie Tate contributed research.

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